



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics and Criticism*

Unraveling sentence complexities in reading comprehension passages: A deconstructive approach for competitive exams

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ABSTRACT

Competitive exams serve as reliable and standardized assessment tools for entry into universities and workplaces alike. Beyond assessing language skills, they meticulously evaluate the ability to reason logically and analyze information. Reading comprehension plays a pivotal role in these exams since it evaluates the reasoning skills and language ability. Sentences in competitive exam reading comprehension passages are intentionally intricate to puzzle the readers. This paper advocates deconstruction of passages whereby the sentences are broken into parts to analyze the twists in the sentence structure, decipher the ambiguities, and comprehend them completely. It shows the results of an experimental study that involved a heterogeneous group of about eighty tertiary learners. They were trained to break the sentences, simplify the complications, interpret the meanings accurately, and answer the questions that follow. Passages and sentences from competitive exams such as the GRE, GMAT, GATE, IELTS, TOEFL, etc., are used to create real-time problem-solving scenarios. This intervention exposed the learners to several sentence styles and refined the structural awareness of the passages. Thereby, the learner improvements in performances were evaluated. It is evident that deconstruction and syntactic analyses have influenced the interpretation of the passage and enhanced accuracy.

KEYWORDS: competitive exams, deconstruction, interpretations, problem-solving, reading comprehension, sentence styles, syntactic analysis

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Introduction

As Derrida (2004) quotes, A text is not a text unless it hides from the firstcomer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. (Derrida, 2004). While writers take pride in hiding the meaning in the text, readers strive to unravel the complexities and discover the intended meaning. Deconstruction lays the foundation for breaking the text and understanding the meaning. Right from Jacques Derrida, ‘Deconstruction’ has revealed many facts and demystified many mysteries. It has brought in new ways of interpreting text and meaning. Yegen (2014) observes that deconstruction focuses on understanding the text, language, and its meaning in the context of postmodern universities, challenging the dominant conceptions of meanings and encouraging reconstructed meanings (Yegen et al., 2014). Jacques Derrida (1973) has coined the term “différance” (spelt with an “a”). Différance refers to the play of differences and deferrals in the language. It proposes that meaning is never fully present in a language but is always in the state of becoming, whereby the words gain their meaning by being different from other words (Derrida, 1973). Deconstruction challenges the idea of a single and fixed interpretation of a text. There are multiple meanings for the text, and there can be many contradictions. Interpretation of meaning is heavily impacted by readers’ perspectives, and it is subjective in nature. He has drawn attention to the phrase “against the grain,” whereby he calls examining the text against the fixed meaning. Deconstruction exceeds or explodes the logical appeal of the linguistic science. It focuses on the complex relationship between meaning and its communication (Schleifer, 1987).

Derrida’s deconstruction emphasizes breaking down the text. It exposes the ambiguities and the inherent complexities of the text. Some opposing concepts, like paradoxes, which are considered to be mutually exclusive, are destabilized and questioned by deconstruction. The differences in interpretations, linguistic ambiguity, and contextual understanding are analyzed meticulously. The authority of authors in shaping the meaning is argued. In language, deconstruction examines the sense and the meaning of the language. It explores the relationship between perception and consciousness (Stocker, 2006). The complexities in discerning the right meaning are not just a challenge; it is more than a twisted knot that needs a lot of practice and strategic analysis to untwist. Trabasso, in his studies, has identified that comprehension involves sentence integration, word recognition, and syntactic processing. Skills in understanding the context, analyzing the text, and identifying the differences are tested to the core. (Trabasso, 1991).

Problem Statement

In most recruitment processes, reading comprehension is crucial as it assesses critical thinking and analytical skills. However, interpreting passages correctly remains a challenge for many test-takers, particularly for second language learners. Particularly for the second language learner, understanding a passage correctly is a difficult task. Mohammad and Hasbi (2021) refer to the statistics that ESL learners in India have poor accuracy in comprehension and also in the reading rate, with about 50% at the low level, 30% at the high level, and 20% at the mid-level (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). As Ellmen and Oslund have pointed out, a collaborative approach among the educators, policymakers, and researchers is needed to enrich the comprehension skills of the learners, and it is important to develop the comprehending ability in order to make the learners effective problem solvers (Elleman & Oslund, 2019). The primary objective of this research is to train learners in various sentence styles, thereby enhancing their understanding of sentences. By carefully analyzing sentence construction, one can easily grasp their intended meaning. As Louisa C. Moats (2000) has quoted, “Understanding of sentence structure supports reading comprehension, and construction of sentences is elementary to written expression” (Moats, 2000). Further, Sterelny (1990) suggests that one way to think of text comprehension is as the integration of words and text. Sentences are constructed by connecting words in a certain order. Syntax, or the order of words in a phrase, conveys meaning in addition to the words themselves (Sterelny 1990). Chick (2012) emphasizes the importance of grammar by quoting that grammatical proficiency is a fundamental ability needed to comprehend a sentence or a passage (Chik et al. 2012).

Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored the impact of reading comprehension passages on enhancing reading skills and effective methods for testing them. One such study by Ashley Adams and Sanabria (2022) in their work “A Reading Comprehension Intervention for Dual Language Learners with Weak Language and Reading

Skills” explored the possibilities of reading comprehension in enhancing language abilities. The research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of EMBRACE (Enhanced Moved by Reading to Accelerate Comprehension in English), a reading comprehension intervention, among dual language learners (DLLs) who struggled with English reading, including those with language disorders. Participants utilized iPads to engage with multi-chapter story images. The study concludes that EMBRACE holds promise for DLLs with weak reading skills, suggesting that future research should align text difficulty with children’s skills for optimal intervention efficacy (Ashley Adams & Sanabria, 2022). Gehlot et al. (2020), in their study named ‘Evaluation of reading habits of Indian students, pointed out that cultivating the reading habits in Indian children during their early years can make them easily enhance their language skills (Gehlot, L., Al-Khalaf, H., & Gehlot, H., 2020).

Lervag et al. (2010), in their study titled “Vocabulary Knowledge as a Critical Determinant of the Difference in Reading Comprehension Growth Between First and Second Language Learners,” examined how understanding and vocabulary skills influence the longitudinal development of reading comprehension in first (L1) and second (L2) language learners. Using two-group latent growth models, researchers compared growth patterns and predictive abilities among 198 L1 learners and 90 L2 learners. The results indicate that L1 learners exhibited superior initial reading comprehension skills and faster growth rates. Both decoding and vocabulary skills predicted initial reading comprehension, but only vocabulary significantly influenced subsequent growth, particularly in L2 learners. This highlights the importance of oral vocabulary training for L2 learners to enhance their reading comprehension abilities. (Lervag, Arne, and Vibeke Grover Aukrust, 2010)

Thondike et al. (2009) conducted experiments on paragraph reading mistakes in their study titled “Reading as Reasoning: A Study of Mistakes in Paragraph Reading,” where they detailed their findings. The intricate process of reading involves carefully considering multiple elements within a sentence and arranging them properly in relation to one another. Even answering basic questions about a straightforward paragraph encompasses the essential aspects of typical reasoning. In accurate reading, each word carries a precise meaning, and each aspect of that meaning is appropriately balanced against the others. Reading may falter due to incorrect word connections, the unbalanced significance of elements, or not considering the ideas generated as provisional. The conclusion drawn is that exercises in silent reading, aimed at finding answers to given questions or composing summaries, should predominantly supplant oral reading. Similarly, Balasubramiam (2023), in his work ‘Reading Dysfluency in Indian Classrooms: An Insight, has conducted an experimental study with the Indian technical students and found that the dysfluency issues among the students can be rectified through choral reading, echo reading, and loud reading. (Balasubramaniam, 2023)

Testing methods play a crucial role in ensuring improvements in reading comprehension. In the experimental study conducted by Shohamy (1984), titled “Does the Testing Method Make a Difference? The Case of Reading Comprehension reveals the strong impact of testing methods on reading comprehension. Particularly among low-level proficiency students, significant differences in results were observed with different testing methods. Shohamy’s study investigates the influence of various testing methods on the assessment of reading comprehension, focusing on differences in complexity arising from the use of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. These questions were administered in both first language (L1) and second language (L2) contexts, all based on L2 texts. The findings indicate significant variations in difficulty levels across testing methods, with each method being influenced by variables such as methodological approach, text complexity, and language proficiency. These effects are particularly notable among students with lower proficiency levels. As a result, the study advocates for the adoption of diverse testing procedures in assessing reading comprehension (Shohamy, 1984).

Survey and Analysis

An essential question for many test takers is whether background knowledge truly matters when it comes to understanding reading comprehension passages, a crucial aspect of improving proficiency in this skill. Many exam takers heavily rely on their background knowledge when approaching reading comprehension passages. The debate surrounding whether background knowledge is necessary to excel in these passages is significant. Although guidelines from ETS (Exam Testing Services) clearly state that no background knowledge is required, it’s a common psychological tendency for individuals to find it easier when passages relate to their area of expertise. In a study primarily conducted among engineering college students, most participants found it easier

to comprehend science-related passages. Another key objective of this research is to shift learners' focus from background context to the text itself and its construction. Emphasizing the twists in construction and syntax is crucial.

Do you have a feeling that you are comfortable when you get certain types of reading comprehension passages in exams - maybe related to your subject expertise or interest?

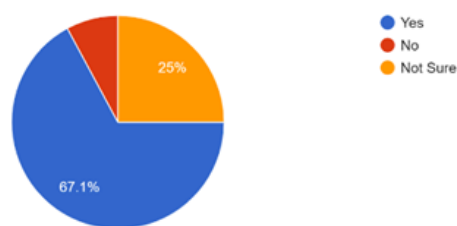


Figure 1

Do you think, that one can get the answers to the questions of a reading comprehension passage from the passage itself or some background knowledge is needed.

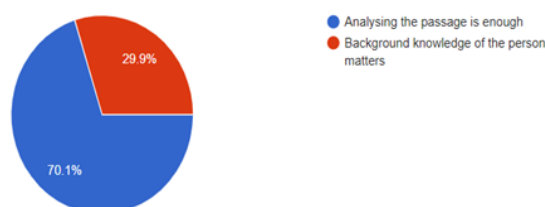


Figure 2

As shown in Figure 2, about 70.1% of the learners accepted the notion that one can find the answers to questions in a reading comprehension passage from the passage itself, without the need for background knowledge. This indicates the importance they place on analyzing the passage rather than relying on background knowledge. It also suggests that enriching the analytical skills of the learner is the primary focus of the reading comprehension passage. As shown in figure 1, 67.1% of the learners expressed the view that they feel more comfortable answering questions when passages from their area of interest are included in the exam. This contradicts the claim that analyzing the passage alone is sufficient to answer questions correctly. It indicates that, although they are aware of the importance of analytical skills in answering reading comprehension questions, they often rely on their background knowledge rather than their analytical abilities.

In this context, Reid et al. (2021) conducted an extensive study on the impact of learners' background knowledge on the analysis of reading comprehension passages and answering questions among primary school-aged children. Their analysis revealed that varying levels of background knowledge have diverse effects, depending on factors such as text complexity, the demand for constructing a situation model, and reader misconceptions. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the influence of background knowledge differs between stronger and weaker readers. Readers with lower background knowledge tend to benefit more from texts with high cohesion, while weaker readers demonstrate an ability to compensate for their limited reading skills in environments rich with background knowledge. (Reid Smith, Pamela Snow, Tanya Serry & Lorraine Hammond, 2021)

Many studies that have emerged in the realm of reading comprehension have focused on background knowledge, vocabulary skills, language proficiency, and assessment methods to enhance the understanding of a passage. The present study has identified a gap in learners' ability to identify the sentence styles, break the sentence, and understand. Various sentence structures and styles engaged, particularly in the reading comprehension passages of the GRE exam, focus on testing the skill of the exam taker in deconstructing the twists and finding the right meanings. Time pressure, convolutions in sentences, and traps in the questions often pose a big challenge for the exam taker, and they fall prey to wrong answers frequently. Most exam takers of

the GRE obtain lower scores in verbal when compared to the quantitative part of the exam. Research indicates that Indian students taking the GRE tend to score lower in the verbal section compared to the quantitative section (ETS, 2017). Specifically, data from ETS reveals that Indian test-takers have an average verbal score of 144.0 and an average quantitative score of 153.2 (PrepScholar, 2024). This disparity is notable and suggests that Indian students generally perform better in the quantitative section, possibly due to stronger educational emphasis on quantitative skills in their academic backgrounds. It also indicates that the verbal ability of the Indian students is below expectations, mainly because they can't understand the sentences given in the exam. This study is an attempt to help young learners identify their flaws in understanding the sentences correctly and to score excellent marks in the examination.

About eighty students of various proficiency levels participated in the study. The objective is to enhance students' understanding capabilities in identifying complexities within sentences. These complexities often arise due to the intertwined meaning within the structural construction of sentences. For instance, consider the following short example: Instead of saying, 'I cannot tolerate your behavior,' one might say, 'I can tolerate it if you don't behave like this.' Both sentences convey the same meaning, but the differences in their constructions significantly matter. A questionnaire was given to respondents to understand their views on reading comprehension. The questions aimed to assess respondents' interest in reading and their ability to comprehend reading passages.

Would you prefer to read a book or to watch a video?

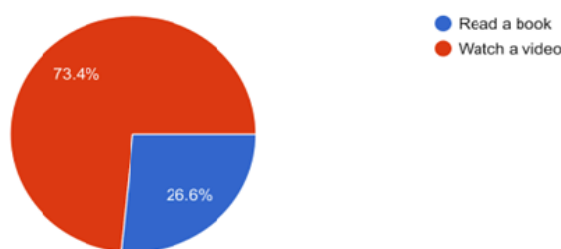


Figure 3

Usually, Visuals present in a video is less interactive than the imagination that a text can create. Do you agree with the statement given above?

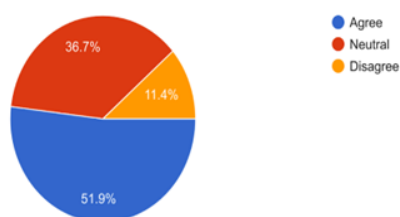


Figure 4

As shown in Figure 3, about 73% of the respondents indicated a preference for watching videos over reading a book. However, about 52% of the same respondents expressed the opinion that visuals limit their imagination, as shown in Figure 4. This contradiction in their statements indicates a lack of proper understanding about reading. While many acknowledge that the text in a book can stimulate more imagination than the visuals in a video, they still feel more comfortable watching videos rather than reading text.

What do you think is the main reason for you to go wrong in a reading comprehension questions?

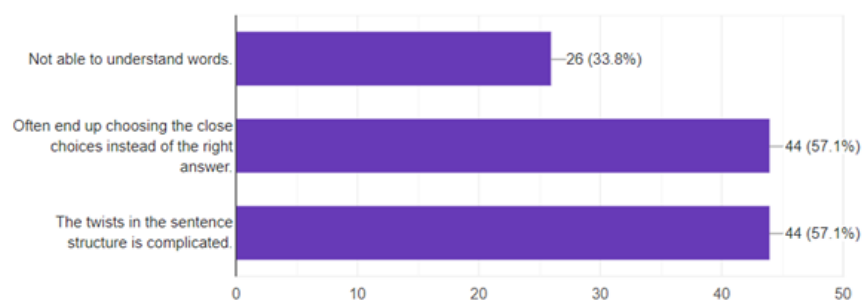


Figure 5

When asked about the reasons for making errors in reading comprehension passages, approximately 57.1% of respondents expressed that they frequently select close choices. Similarly, about 57.1% of students stated that the twists in sentence structure complicate their understanding. Additionally, 33.8% of respondents expressed difficulty in understanding words altogether. This indicates that a majority of learners struggle to accurately grasp the meaning conveyed in sentences. This is shown in figure 5.

Do you think there is a connect between the logical analysis carried out in mathematics and reading comprehension passage?

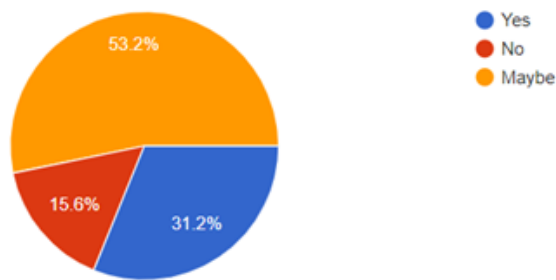


Figure 6

Figure 6 discusses the question that connects the analytical skills with the logical skills in mathematics, which is widely accepted by the respondent. About 53.2% of the respondents strongly believed that there is a connection in terms of analysis between mathematics and reading comprehension. The logical connection between the ideas in a reading comprehension is more like the logical connections in mathematical equations.

Do you believe that answering many reading comprehension questions will improve you logical and reasoning ability and there by your problem solving skills?

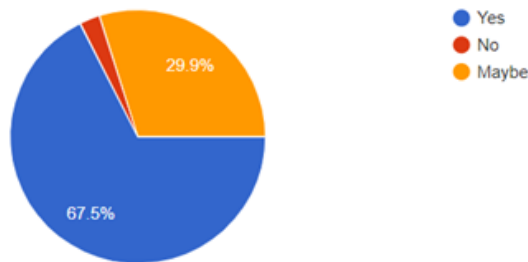


Figure 7

As shown in figure 7, approximately 67.5% of the respondents firmly believe that reading comprehension

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improves their logical and reasoning abilities. However, others were uncertain about the extent to which reading comprehension contributes to enhancing their problem-solving skills.

Comprehending passages is built on two distinct yet interconnected abilities: decoding, which involves recognizing individual written words, and language comprehension, which entails interpreting words and connected discourse. In the initial stages of acquiring reading skills, decoding plays a pivotal role in the process. Additionally, impatience can hinder proper passage comprehension. Time constraints are a significant factor in competitive exams, presenting a key challenge. Reading a passage of about six hundred words within a minute and answering questions is not easy. It requires dedicated practice. The complexity of reading comprehension passages in competitive exams often stems from intentional sentence twists introduced by the author. A stylistic sentence is not inherently flawed, as authors have the prerogative to introduce complexities. A passage in a competitive exam should be complicated to test the reading skills and the understanding ability of the exam taker. While ambiguity in a sentence is typically deemed undesirable, intentional twists are often admired. It is considered a skill for an author to employ stylistic sentences, including those with deliberate twists. This study involves deconstruction to identify stylistic sentences and comprehend their complexities. Scott has pointed out the importance of sentence comprehension in his study. For a successful reading, understanding the sentences and evaluating them within their domain is the major challenge, but doing so has shown improvements in the overall comprehension of the passage (Scott, 2009).

The initial step is to simplify sentences to enhance the clarity of understanding. Complexity poses a challenge, particularly for competitive exam takers who must analyze reading comprehension and respond within tight time constraints. The primary aim of this study is to explore the nature of these twists and identify effective strategies for managing them. Thorough semantic and syntactic analyses are crucial for discerning the precise meaning of sentences. Developing the ability to analyze sentences accurately and understand their structure requires dedicated practice. To facilitate this, separate modules were designed for students to meticulously analyze sentence structures, with a focus on sentences commonly found in GRE exams to familiarize students with their style and structure.

Sentence Style 1: If it were not.

“The hypothesis of an expanding Earth hasn’t attracted enough support. If it were not for the example of continental drift, such an indifference might be a legitimate response to an apparently improbable concept.” (TWfirst, 2017)

The group members were tasked with reading the sentence and answering the following question: ‘Is the continental drift a reason for the expanding earth not getting enough support?’ They were expected to respond with a simple yes or no. Surprisingly, over 80% of the respondents provided incorrect answers, and none were able to explain their responses accurately. While many struggled to understand the connection between expanding earth and continental drift, most recognized that the main idea of the sentence pertained to the expanding earth concept.

Here is an analysis of the example given above:

Example 1.1: “The hypothesis of expanding earth hasn’t attracted enough support. If it were not for the example of continental drift, such an indifference might be a legitimate response to an apparently improbable concept.” (TWfirst, 2017)

In this example, the second sentence is written in a particular style. To answer the question ‘whether the continental drift is the reason for the expanding earth not getting enough support,’ this sentence style should be understood clearly.

A similar example was given to the group members:

Example 1.2: ‘It is not unusual to see the seats reserved for women being occupied during peak hours in public transportation. If it were not the youngsters, it would have been tolerable.’

Now the question is whether the seats are occupied by the youngsters or not. Here, it is quite easy to guess that

the seats are occupied by the youngsters. The deceiving point in this sentence is that though it states “not the youngsters,” it actually means that the youngsters are occupying it. That is the nature of ‘if’ conditions. Two instances in which an if clause is used are ‘condition’ and ‘wish.’

In the sentence given below, ‘If’ is a condition:

‘If you come to class regularly, you will get excellent marks.’

Whereas in the sentence given below, a wish is expressed by the writer.

If I were you, I would have spent all the money. One would give such a statement only when that person was not the other one.

If I were the Prime Minister of India, I would have signed this bill. - Imagine when the speaker would make such a statement. Only when he/she is not a prime minister. Being a Prime Minister, no one would say, “If I were the Prime Minister.”

Such sentences are often used to convey wishes or dreams that contrast with reality, where the reality is always opposite to the expressed desire. For example, one might wish a crowded bus were free, but in reality, it is not. By training learners to identify and categorize sentence styles, they can more easily grasp the intended meaning. It’s crucial to familiarize learners with various sentence styles to enhance understanding. For instance, sentences beginning with ‘If’ expressing a wish typically present an idea contrary to reality. In the example ‘If it were not for the example of continental drift,’ the condition ‘if’ indicates a wish. Consequently, the reality is opposite to the expressed wish, with continental drift becoming the reason for the hypothesis not receiving enough support. These sentences are intentionally twisted by the authors to puzzle the readers, and competitive exams use such sentences to evaluate the reading skills of the learners. As Perkins has pointed out, though the semantic proficiency is exhibited by the ESL student through the information found in the text and their understanding of the world, the language interference and data- and resource limitations hinder the learner from completely understanding the text (Perkins, 1983).

Sentence Style 2: “Do not necessarily”

Example: 2.1 Young entrepreneurs do not necessarily rely on family because they cannot get bank loans.”

Learners were tasked with analyzing the sentence and determining whether young entrepreneurs rely on their kin. Approximately 60% of them recognized the presence of a sentence style. However, about 50% of respondents selected the option indicating that entrepreneurs do not rely on their kin. They were primarily misled by the phrase ‘do not necessarily.’ In this sentence style, the phrase ‘do not necessarily’ appears to be negative due to the inclusion of ‘do not,’ but the subsequent word ‘necessarily’ actually makes it positive. Including the next part of the sentence would provide clarity.

Example 2.1.1: ‘Young entrepreneurs do not necessarily rely on their kin just because they cannot get financial support from the banks. They do so because banks levy high interest rates on the loans they provide.’

It is now evident that entrepreneurs do not necessarily rely on banks due to the high interest rates they impose on loans. Sentence styles featuring the phrase ‘do not necessarily’ reveal the true reason only in the second part of the sentence.

Examples 2.2: Members of the farming community in this district do not necessarily migrate to cities solely because of the hard labor involved in agriculture. They may also do so because they do not receive fair prices for their produce or because the allure of the city is greater.

Similarly, individual entrepreneurs from minority ethnic groups do not necessarily rely on their kin solely because they cannot obtain financial backing from commercial resources. They may also avoid banks because

they believe that commercial institutions either cannot understand the special needs of minority enterprises or charge unreasonably high interest rates. Students were trained on identifying and understanding the phrases that can lead to misunderstanding. Structural analysis of the sentences has shown good improvement in the overall understanding of the students. As Carrell in his study pointed out, exposing learners to high-level rhetorical organization of sentences makes them efficient in intermediate-level reading tasks (Carrell, 1985). So, drills and exercises were given continuously to improve their proficiency in sentence structure.

Example 2.3: ‘People from villages do not necessarily migrate to cities because of the low income they get in villages. They also do so lured by the lucrative life of the cities.’

After the practice, when the learners were asked, Do they migrate? More than 90% of the respondents were able to identify the sentence style correctly. Here, the real reason for the villagers to migrate to cities is the attraction they have towards the lucrative life in cities. At this point, most learners have understood how to identify a sentence style. Now understanding the sentence style is the next step. Familiarizing them with a lot of sentence styles proved effective. We have given the learners five more sentence styles, of which two were discussed here to demonstrate the ability to grasp the styles involved.

Sentence Style 3: “Granted that.”

Here is another sentence taken from a passage given in the Graduate Record Examination.

Example 3.1: “Granted that the presence of these elements need not argue an authorial awareness of novelistic construction comparable to that of Henry James, their presence does encourage attempts to unify the novel’s heterogeneous parts.” (GRE Official Guide, 2011; p. 73)

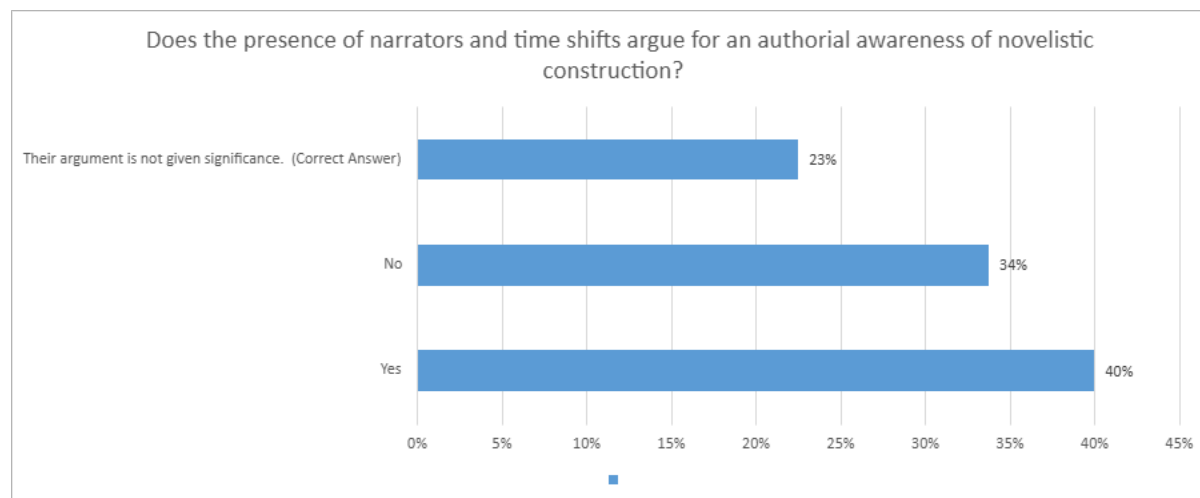


Figure 8

Granted that the presence of these elements need not argue for an authorial awareness of novelistic construction comparable to that of Henry James, their presence does encourage attempts to unify the novel’s heterogeneous parts.” Many students struggled to determine whether the elements indicate authorial awareness or not. Furthermore, they were uncertain about the significance of mentioning the presence of these elements if they did not argue for authorial awareness. Only about 23% of the respondents answered correctly. It’s crucial to focus on the writer’s assertion that these elements do not necessarily argue for authorial awareness. Typically, constructions like this compare two ideas of unequal importance. This sentence does not emphasize authorial awareness because the author does not intend for the elements to support it. Instead, the emphasis lies on their presence, which encourages attempts to unify the novel’s heterogeneous parts.

Here is another example:

Example 3.2: “Granted that the mere possession of degrees from highly reputed universities does not necessarily guarantee professional success, there is nevertheless a preference for those who possess such degrees. Employers feel that there is a higher probability of success as the individual has been through the grind and has been successful.”

The question posed here is whether possessing degrees from highly reputed universities guarantees success or not. Approximately seventy percent of the respondents identified the sentence style, yet struggled to answer the question accurately. Interestingly, the sentence itself doesn’t emphasize possession of the degree; rather, it highlights the preference given to students by employers. Employers favor these students because they have demonstrated success through their experiences. Familiarizing learners with various sentence styles has significantly enhanced their ability to decipher difficult words in sentences and unravel the twists and turns employed by writers.

Sentence Style 4 - “If it does not reverse”:

Here is another Graduate Record Exam sentence given for the student.

Example 4.1: ‘Many critics of Emily Brontë’s novel Wuthering Heights see its second part as a counterpoint that comments on, if it does not reverse, the first part, where a “romantic” reading receives more confirmation.’ (GRE Official Guide, 2011; p73)

The learners were asked whether the second part of the novel is romantic or not. The sentence implies that the first part of the novel is romantic because romantic reading is confirmed. However, many respondents were uncertain about whether the second part is romantic. The term “counterpoint” catches the eye, leading more than 50% of respondents to believe that the second part is not romantic. Yet, there is a sentence style at play here. “If it does not reverse” implies that the second part is not completely opposite the first. By deconstructing this phrase, learners realized that “reverse” implies going backward or moving in the opposite direction. Thus, the author implies that the second part does not completely reverse directions. While the second part is a counterpoint to the first, it still has romance. In conclusion, the second part may be less romantic than the first. Understanding the questions of the competitive exam is another important. The experimental group was trained on connecting the question very well with the passage and analyzing the passage and the question in five steps.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research have demonstrated that understanding sentence styles not only aids in comprehending sentences accurately but also assists in answering questions in competitive exams. Approximately 70% of learners exhibited rapid improvements in their understanding through this practice. Nearly every test taker successfully identified sentence styles, with many able to deconstruct sentences to comprehend twists. Moreover, over 80% of learners accurately identified meanings of difficult words through word association and contextual understanding. This study has significantly influenced learners’ approaches to challenging sentences. The survey and test results unequivocally indicate that intervention with pedagogical strategies focusing on sentence examination and understanding sentence structure enhances comprehension abilities. Pre-test results indicate learners’ proficiency in answering factual questions and comprehending passage information. In the same line, Cai and Yoa (2022) conducted a study on the Chinese students in the high schools on teaching complex sentences. They have identified that given practice on the structural analysis has shown positive predictive effects on the overall syntactic proficiency in ESL reading among the Chinese students. (Cai & Yao, 2022).

The results of the study were based on the differences in scores of the experimental group between the pre-test and the post-test. A pre-test was conducted before the intervention, and the learners’ abilities on various question types, including questions that test the main idea, inferences, the author’s intention, and critical

reasoning, were given. The post-test was given in the same manner, and their results were compared based on the question types to understand the progress learners have made as a result of the intervention. Primarily, their ability to understand the text and decipher the inferential questions was focused.

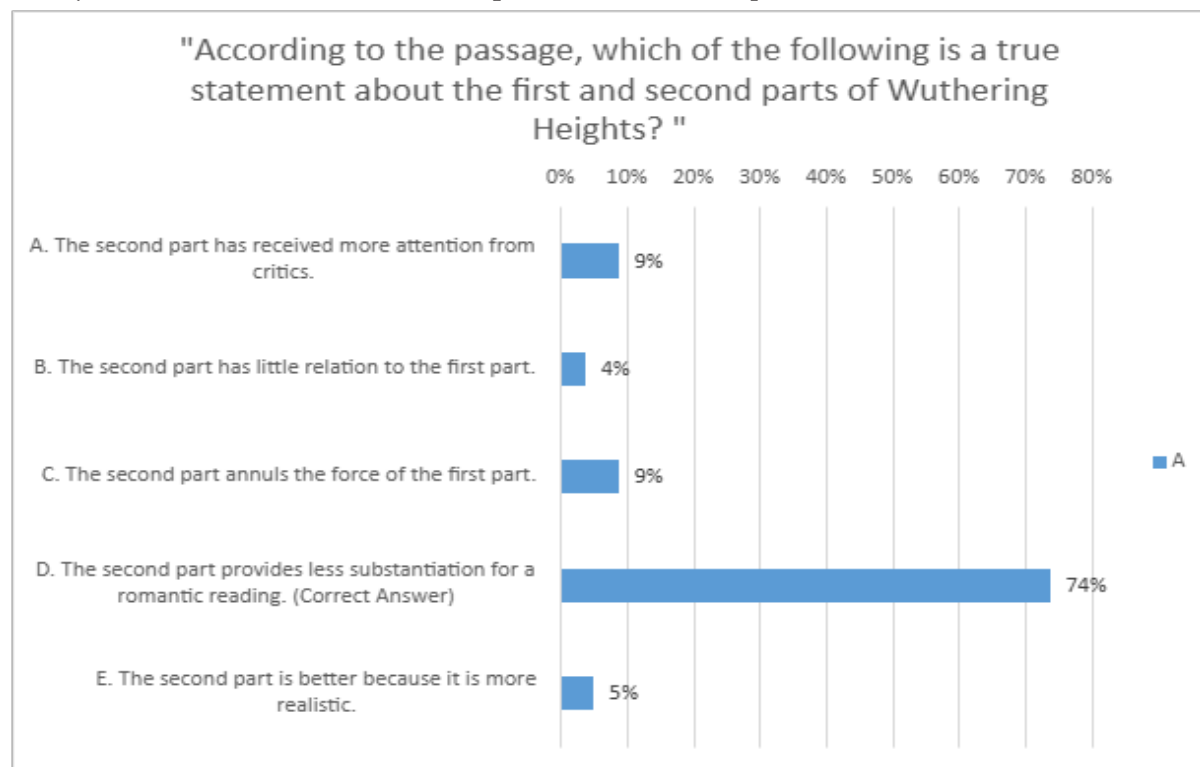


Figure 9: Pre-Test

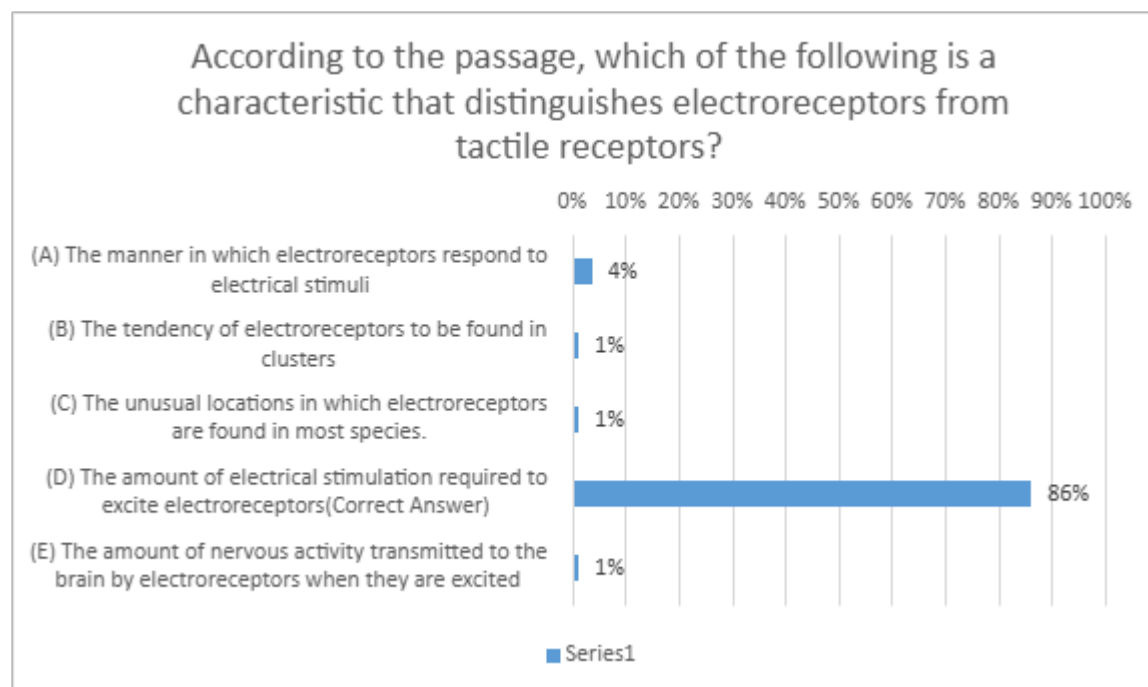


Figure 10: Post Test

The first questions of the passages given both in the pre-test and the post-test mainly tested the learner's ability to read the lines and grasp the information. Two reading comprehension passages chosen from the GRE Exams conducted by ETS. A passage on "Wuthering Heights" was given in the pretest, and a passage on the Australian researcher experiment on the ant-eater was given in the posttest. The first question in both the passages is a factual question that demands direct understanding. In this question, "According to the passage, which of the following is a true statement about the first and second parts of Wuthering Heights?" - 74% of the learners,

some gave the right answers, as shown in Figure 10. While in past tense for the same factual “question—”According to the passage, which of the following is a characteristic that distinguishes electroreceptors from tactile receptors?”—86% of the learners got it right. However, after the intervention, their consciousness about the information present in the line has increased.

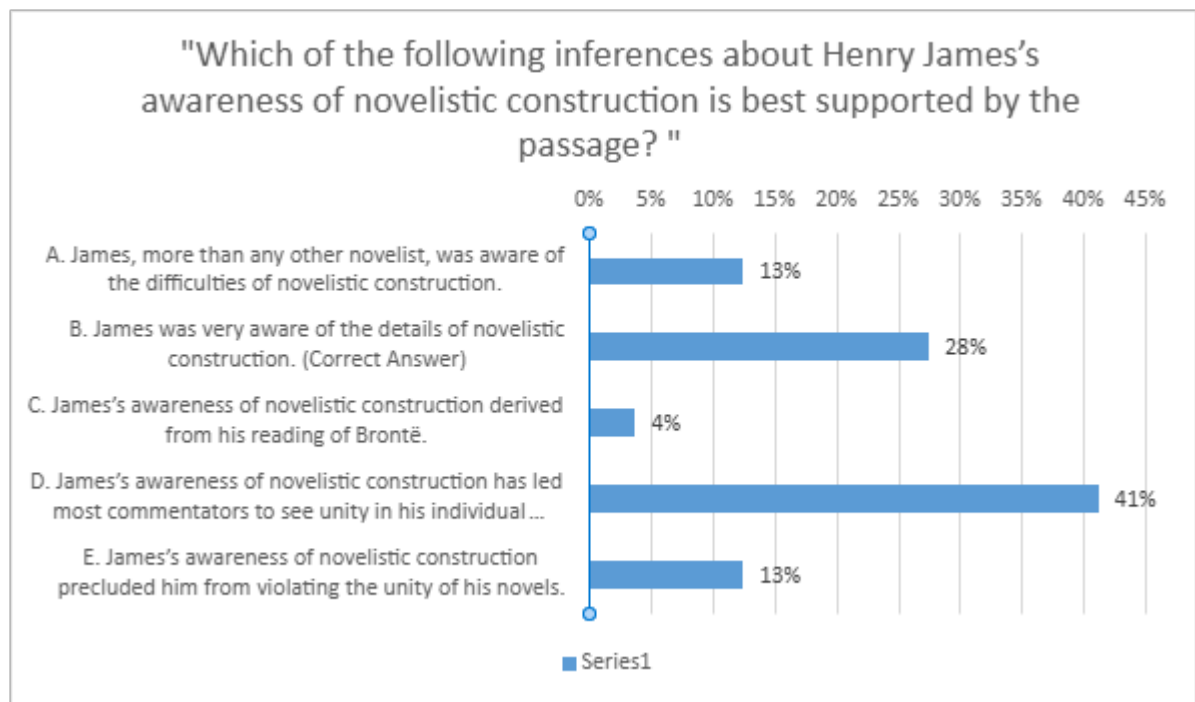


Figure 11: Pre-Test

As shown in Figure 11, in the pretest an inferential question is given stating, “Which of the following inferences about Henry James awareness is best supported by the passage?”. When it came to inferring the answer using the clues, most of them got it wrong. Only about 28% of the learners picked the right choice. So, it is evident that the analytical ability of the students, particularly in the inferential question, needs improvement.

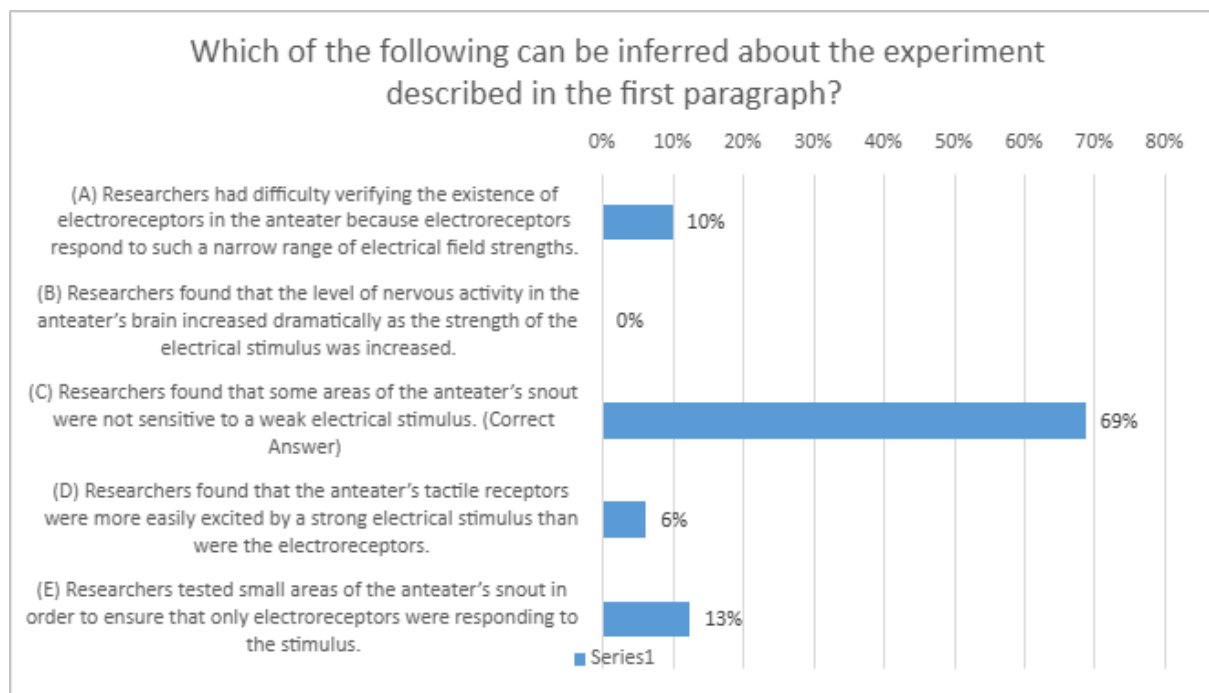


Figure 12- (Post Test)

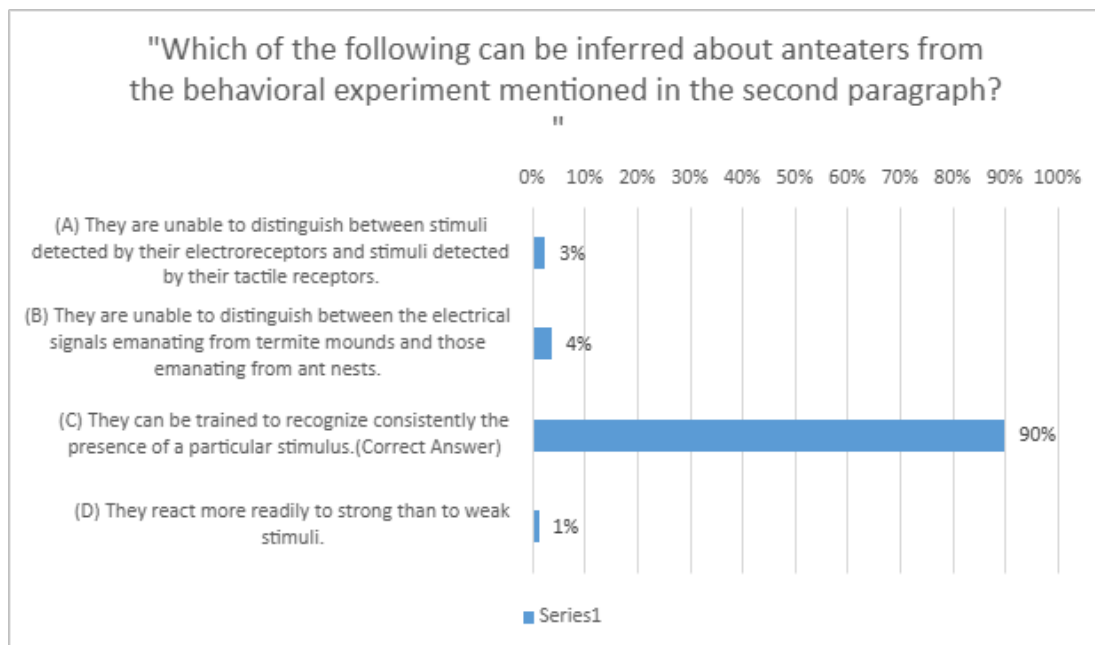


Figure 13 (Post Test)

Figures 12 and 13 show the inferential questions in the post-tests. The questions are as follows:

1. "Which of the following can be inferred about the experiment described in the first paragraph?" and
2. "Which of the following can be inferred about anteaters from the behavioral experiment mentioned in the second paragraph?"

"As shown in Figures 12 and 13, the performance of the learners improved in the posttests. About 69% of the learners got the correct answer in the first question, and about 90% of the learners got the correct answer in the second question. This shows a significant improvement in understanding inferential questions. They were able to read between the lines and understand the overall hidden meaning.

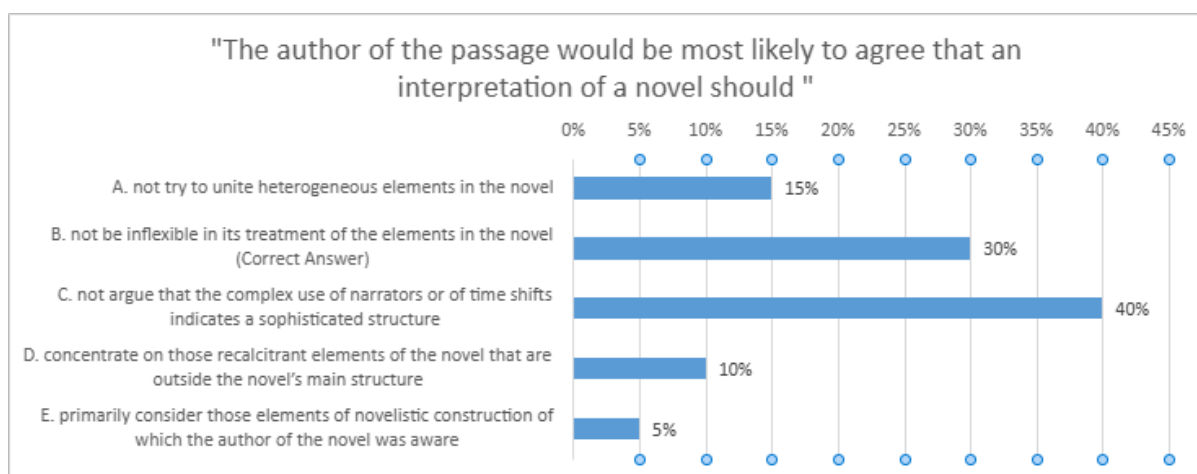


Figure 14 (Pre Test)

A question on the author's point of view is given in the pre-test as shown in Figure 14. The line from the passage, "This is not because such an interpretation necessarily stiffens into a thesis (although rigidity in any interpretation of this or of any novel is always a danger), but because *Wuthering Heights* has recalcitrant elements of undeniable power that, ultimately, resist inclusion in an all-encompassing," should be understood clearly to answer this question. The learner should read the part of the sentence "rigidity in any interpretation... is always a danger." This line clearly says that the interpretation should be flexible. Now, the option 'B' says "not be inflexible." This is a double negative, which means flexible. Such shifts and complexities in GRE passages

are common. As shown in figure 14 only 30% of the respondents got it right, but the rest of them (70%) got it wrong in the pretest. It shows that proper reading of sentences to understand the sentence styles is essential.

The author of the passage most probably discusses the function of tactile receptors [While it is true that tactile receptors, another kind of sensory organ on the anteater's snout, can also respond to electrical stimuli, .. only in response to electrical field strengths about 1,000 times greater than those known to excite electroreceptors.] in order to

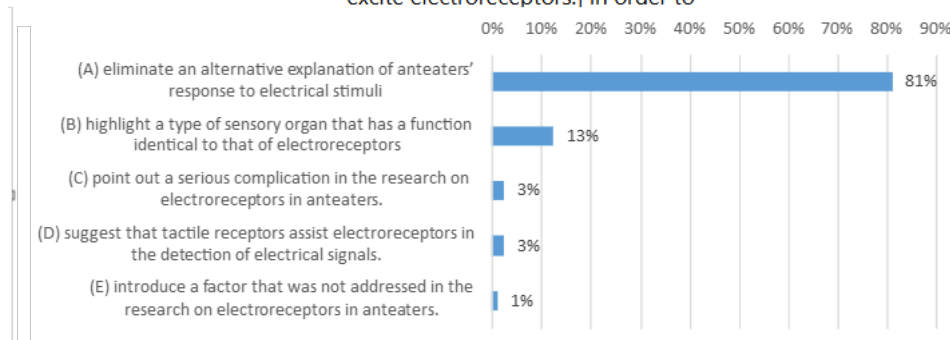


Figure- 15

After several modules were presented to them, awareness about the sentence style improved. Let us take the question given in the post test. (The author of the passage most probably discusses the function of tactile receptors [While it is true that tactile receptors, another kind of sensory organ on the anteater's snout, can also respond to electrical stimuli, ... only in response to electrical field strengths about 1,000 times greater than those known to excite electroreceptors.]) in order to answer this question correctly, the learner has to understand the presence of both tactile receptors and electroreceptors in the anteater snout. Then the learner should identify that only electroreceptors will respond to weak electrical stimuli. Whereby, when a weak electrical stimulus is passed, the tactiles don't respond, whereas electroreceptors respond. So, the right answer is that for this, the tactile receptor won't be competent. So, option A, which says to eliminate an alternate explanation, is the right answer. This can be understood only by the learner who deciphers the line, "While it is true that tactile receptor.... 1000 times greater..." as given above.

In this case, most learners fail to understand that the experiment involves only weak electrical signals and not strong electrical signals. This particular line, "The researchers made this discovery by exposing small areas of the snout to extremely weak electrical fields," clearly states that extremely weak electrical fields were passed. Now in the line mentioned here, it is stated the tactile receptors only respond to the electrical field strength 1000 times more. Thereby, one can understand that tactile receptors will not respond to weak electrical fields. The transitional word "while" holds major significance since it is the indicator to understand the experiment of identifying the tactile receptor was carried out long back. The phrase "while it is true" is used to mention something that is usual. The learners were given practice in sentence shifts and transitional phrases, and about 81% of them were able to get this tricky question correct in the posttest.

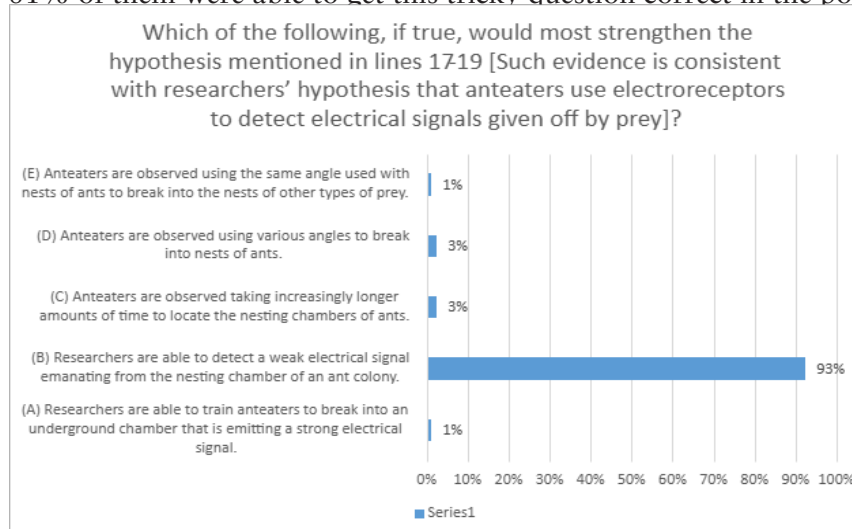


Figure 16

Careful reading is another important aspect when it comes to reading comprehension passages. The question given above is a critical reasoning question that checks for the missing gap. Sometimes, the author jumps to a conclusion without giving enough evidence, and at times the conclusion is not reached. This question in Figure 16 asks for the possible conclusion of the experiment. What would strengthen the hypothesis is the activity that the anteater finds its prey through the weak electrical signal? This electrical signal should emanate from the ant's nest and be sensed by the anteater. Strengthening of the conclusion is much reliant on the idea of an anteater using its electroreceptor to sense its prey. This can only be proved right if there is any electrical field from the ant colony. Hence, Option B is correct. In the post-test, learners were able to read between the lines and understand the meaning very well. This intervention had proved to be successful, particularly in developing the consciousness of the learner in the presence of a twist.

This intervention has particularly boosted the confidence of the learner. They were able to meticulously look for details. Improving the vicinity of the underlying clues and the sentence structures proved to be very effective in answering the reading comprehension.

This bar plot shows the mean pre-test and post-test scores, clearly illustrating the overall improvement.



This boxplot displays the distribution of pre-test and post-test scores, showing how the scores have shifted and become more concentrated after the test.

Mean Scores

Statistical Significance: I conducted a paired t-test to determine if the improvement was statistically significant. The results show:

| Metric | Value |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| Mean PreTest Percentage | 0.378571429 |
| Mean PostTest Percentage | 0.839583333 |
| Mean Improvement | 0.461011905 |
| T-Statistic | -16.97730022 |
| P-Value | 4.40724E-28 |

This indicates that, on average, there was a substantial improvement in scores from the pre-test to the post-test.

Given below is the scatter plot.



This scatter plot compares pre-test scores to post-test scores for each individual. Points above the diagonal red line represent improvements.

| Metric | PreTest | PostTest |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| Count | 80 | 80 |
| Mean | 2.65 | 5.0375 |
| Std | 0.955994 | 0.818207 |
| Min | 0 | 4 |
| 25% | 2 | 4 |
| 50% | 3 | 5 |
| 75% | 3 | 6 |
| Max | 5 | 6 |
| Improvement | | 2.3875 |

The paired t-test analysis indicates that the educational intervention has a deep impact in the improvement of the learner ability in answering the questions. The mean percentage of the PreTest is 37.68% and the mean percentage of the PostTest is 83.96%. The mean improvement is about 46.10%. There is a substantial improvement between the PreTest and PostTest. The t-statistics is approximately -16.98 and the p-value is approximately 4.41×10^{-28} .

Conclusion

Ghosh has pointed out that the improvement in reading comprehension skills can improve the overall problem-solving skills of individuals as they are interconnected. With the problem-solving skills being the most preferred skills around the globe. This intervention in improving their comprehension ability should eventually improve their creativity and problem-solving abilities (P, M., & Ghosh, A. 2012). It is important to improve the consciousness of the exam taker regarding sentence structure and construction to avoid mistakes in reading comprehension. Though the main idea of the passage is essential and should be observed clearly, it is crucial to understand each and every sentence of the passage correctly. Questions are often asked on sentences where the meaning is twisted. A thorough understanding of the passage is important for answering all the questions correctly. All the practice sentences given to the students had various forms of sentence styles. Initially, learners found it difficult to understand the sentences as they easily got twisted. Through regular practice, they have understood the nuances of identifying sentence structures. Soon, they also developed a sense of understanding

linkers, paradoxes, ambiguities, and eye-catchers that authors use to deceive readers. It would have never been an effortless job without language detectives identifying the minute glitches that could make the entire answer go wrong. Most times, it is not because the exam taker is unskilled but because they overlook minute details. Therefore, one has to be meticulous in handling competitive exam questions. Many students have realized that focusing on these details significantly improves their comprehension skills. As they practice, they become more adept at spotting subtle tricks and nuances, which enhances their overall performance. This meticulous attention to detail not only helps in exams but also fosters better reading and analytical skills in general.

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Disclaimer Statement

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Author Biodata

I am presently working as a Teaching Fellow at Anna University, a state university in Tamil Nadu, South India. I am conducting research connecting thinking abilities with learning capabilities, particularly in the context of understanding reading comprehension passages. I have previously worked in several educational institutions and content writing firms. Additionally, I worked in Zambia as an Assistant Professor for about two years. My experiences have shaped my understanding of the needs of young students and inspired me to engage in research aimed at developing their skills. Furthermore, I have spearheaded many initiatives within the university and beyond to educate and motivate underprivileged students from remote areas of South India.

Authorship and Level of Contribution

This paper is co-authored by Dr. Deepa Mary Francis, Assistant Professor, Anna University. She has extended her support in editing the questionnaire and the survey materials. We have together carried out lot of discussion and idea formation on this topic. She has also extended her support in editing and proof reading the article.

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